

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**Regulation Change: Allow lighted nocks as legal Archery Equipment**

**Region: Statewide**

**Year: 2017**

**1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history.**

FWP proposes the use of lighted nocks on arrows be allowed as legal archery equipment. The Montana Bowhunter's Association (MBA) asked FWP to consider this proposal as was brought forward at the Fish and Wildlife Commission's December 8, 2016 meeting. As per the Commission's request FWP

Montana has adopted a unique set of equipment regulations based upon the priorities of effective, ethical harvest, fair chase ideals, and minimal impact to the resource. These methods and means assure that Montana maintains the original focus of bowhunting as a challenging, close-range sport.

Montana's current equipment regulations specify that no luminous, electronic, or battery-powered devices be attached to the bow or arrow. These restrictions were based on Pope and Young Club's Rules of Fair Chase. In 2015 the Pope & Young Club changed their bylaws and created an exemption within their "no electronics" stance, allowing lighted nocks and video recording devices.

We propose the following change to the regulations, detailed on page 14 of the 2016 Deer, Elk and Antelope regulations (proposed changes are highlighted with additions underlined and subtractions shown as strike-outs):

**Arrow:** An arrow is a projectile at least 20 inches in overall length. The length of the arrow is measured from the rearward point of the nock to the tip of the broadhead.

- A broadhead is mounted to the fore end.
  - The arrow shall weigh no less than 300 grains with the broadhead attached.
  - Arrows must have broadheads with at least two cutting edges. Expandable broadheads are legal as long as when expanded they are at least 7/8 inches at the widest point, and weigh no less than 70 grains.
  - Arrows equipped with lighted nocks are allowed.
- The following are not considered a hunting bow or legal archery equipment during the Archery Only Season or in an ArchEquip Only area or hunting district:
    - Crossbow
    - Any device with a gun-type stock or incorporating any device or mechanism that holds the bowstring at partial or full draw without the shooter's muscle power.
    - Any bow for which a portion of the bow's riser (handle) or any track, trough, channel, or other device that attaches directly to the bow's riser contacts, supports, and/or guides the arrow from a point rearward of the bow's brace height. This is not intended to restrict the use of standard overdraw systems.
    - Electronic or battery-powered devices attached to a hunting bow.
    - A bow sight ~~or arrow~~ which uses artificial light, luminous chemicals such as tritium, or electronics.

**2. Provide information relevant to this change.**

The Fish and Wildlife Commission Policy on Archery Season Intent and Equipment Evaluation Criteria adopted December 8, 2016 lists six questions to be answered when evaluating any proposed change to archery equipment. The questions are listed below in italic font, and FWP's answers are in regular font.

*Does the equipment change the fundamental nature and intent of archery seasons as stated in the policy? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

No. According to the Policy, the intent of Montana’s archery seasons is:

“Montana designed its archery-only seasons to protect its unique bowhunting opportunities for the benefit of current and future hunters. Montana has a six-week statewide archery-only season plus multiple additional site/time specific hunts, providing one of the most extensive archery hunting opportunities in the nation. Montana possesses many highly coveted game species, several of which also have specific archery only seasons. Archery recruitment is robust, and participation has doubled each decade over the past thirty years. Bowhunting participation among Montana’s women and youth exceeds the national average, thereby ensuring recruitment of future generations.

Montana has abundant and diverse statewide opportunities for mixed weapons adjacent to the archery-only season. These exist within Weapons Restriction Areas as well as during the five-week general season. These opportunities ensure the full inclusion of a broad constituency of hunters, including those with disabilities, women, youth, and older hunters. Hunters consistently express high satisfaction in the variety and quality of the hunting experiences within the state. The Montana bowhunting community expresses strong advocacy towards maintaining their current archery opportunities and promotes archery season as remaining separate from other methods and means.”

FWP does not believe that allowing lighted nocks changes the fundamental nature and intent as stated in the policy

*Is the equipment likely to detract from the historical intent of Montana archery season; namely that the season was intended for high quality archery opportunity with relatively low harvest rates? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

No. FWP does not believe that allowing lighted nocks will compromise any high quality archery opportunity or lead to any measurable increase in harvest.

*Does the equipment challenge, contradict, or lessen Montana’s principle of fair chase? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

No. FWP does not believe that lighted nocks will compromise Montana’s principle of fair chase. Lighted nocks do not lend any additional advantage to the hunter in the pursuit and stalking of an animal up to and including taking a shot.

*Does this equipment have the potential to increase fish and game violations, such as shooting outside of legal shooting hours? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

Yes. FWP believes that having lighted nocks on their arrows does have the potential to tempt some archers to take shots they would not otherwise take. Although we do not believe that such violations are likely to have measurable consequences to game populations, they are violations of laws and contrary to proper hunter ethics.

*Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that it may result in increased bowhunter impact on the resource and increase the possibility of limited permits? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

No. FWP does not believe the use of lighted nocks will increase archery harvest. As stated above, lighted nocks do not lend any additional advantage to the hunter in the pursuit and stalking of an animal up to and including taking a shot.

*Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that the increased harvest either increases conflict among or within user groups or have other negative social implications such as diminished sportsman/ landowner relations? A “no” answer supports the proposal.*

No. As stated immediately above, FWP does not believe the use of lighted nocks will increase archery harvest. Lighted nocks do not lend any additional advantage to the hunter in the pursuit and stalking of an animal up to and including taking a shot. However, electronics on bows or arrows will continue to produce conflict within the bowhunting community, as the Traditional Bowhunters of Montana does support the “no electronics” policy.

**3. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Given the Pope & Young Club’s change of stance, in 2015 the MBA conducted a ballot vote of our membership to determine our direction regarding the use of lighted nocks. Based on the ballot returns, the majority of their membership is in favor of allowing lighted nocks as legal archery equipment.

Submitted by: John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief

Date: December 9, 2016